

# Engage the Writer in Every Child!

## Closing the Gap with Written Communication

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What has research taught us about how handwriting should be taught? How can handwriting instruction be integrated into modern learning environments? What solutions are available for students who struggle with written output?

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### I. Methods of Teaching Handwriting

Handwriting is a motor skill. Teaching a motor skill requires both visual representation and auditory cues. Following this, visual and auditory messages must be integrated to direct muscle movement. Because kinesthetic memory is our strongest form of memory, it is essential that a proper visual representation and meaningful auditory cues be provided.

*Direct kinesthetic steps to teaching handwriting leaves nothing to chance in developing writing skill to its highest level. . . . Essentially all children learn to write more expeditiously using kinesthetic techniques (Benbow, Mary, "Way to Go! Kinesthetic Approach to Handwriting", 1990).*

### II. Integrating Instruction

The computer is a great tool to teach handwriting because it has the ability to provide visual and auditory instructions along with kinesthetic feedback. Teachers have the flexibility of implementing handwriting instruction in a variety of ways to meet their classroom demands and needs. For example, handwriting instruction could be a learning station using classroom computers. In this scenario, the computer guides each student through proper letter formation at his/her own pace. Students print progress reports for teacher tracking. Another teacher may chose to use the program as whole class instruction. The program can be used on an individual student basis.

### III. Finding Solutions

Research states, one reason students struggle with written output is the lack of efficient learning of letter formation. They continue to sketch or draw certain letters; thus, frequently hesitating when writing a story. This inability to write letters automatically means that students' active thought processes and attention are focused on the recall of the letter formation rather than generating ideas, recalling pertinent facts, and remembering the rules of grammar.

*. . . This model implies that certain abilities must be acquired and consolidated before a child can progress to more advanced stages of performance. For example, it is difficult to write about personal thoughts while struggling to recall the motor engrams of letter formation. (Levine, M.D. Developmental Variation and Learning Disorders. Cambridge, MA: Educators Publishing Service, 1999).*

#### A) Group Letters

When letters are grouped according to initial pencil stroke direction, the student can build on a recently acquired motor pattern rather than struggling to learn 52 new and different patterns.

**Step 1:** At the main menu, select **Single** or **Group** button.



**Step 2: Single:** Select **Lower Case Letters**, **Numbers** or **Capital Letters** button. Click on a **letter** or **number** button to start a lesson.

**Group:** Select **Lower Case Letters**, **Numbers** or **Capital Letters** button. Click on a **group** button to start a lesson.



## B) Provide a Multi-sensory Approach

### Step 3: Lesson Instructions

Sound and movement capture students' attention through a 4-step process as letters are individually presented and their patterns are reinforced on the writing lines:



#### Step 1: Step-by-Step button

Students see and hear the formation instructions as they watch the letter written with a pencil graphic.



#### Step 2: Review button

Students observe the star showing the starting point and watch as the pencil writes the letter in a continuous, fluid motion.



#### Step 3: Arrows button

The letter-writing pattern is reinforced as a sequential overlay of starting star and arrows appears on each letter. Arrow colors match the colors of the letter formation instructions.



#### Step 4: Your Turn button

After the auditory prompt *Now you try it*, students have the opportunity to write the letter using a mouse or stylus.



A starting star blinks to show start position with a visual & auditory prompt: *Click the star to begin.*

Students click the **star** and manipulate a mouse or stylus to follow the arrows to correctly form the letter; the pencil stroke fills in as the letter is successfully written. Each successful letter is rewarded with visual & auditory prompts: *Good job! Can you write it 3 more times?; Great! Can you write it 2 more times?; Fantastic! Just 1 more time.*

## C) Address Developmental Factors

*Writing is the largest orchestra a kid's mind has to conduct . . . So it shouldn't surprise us that if one or more of the instruments are lacking, their absence will seriously undermine that student's papers. I think the fact that writing is so complex justifies its leading role in a curriculum. By writing, a kid learns how to mesh multiple brain functions, and ultimately that's something you need to do well whatever you do to earn a living. In a sense, the act of writing helps build and maintain the brain pathways that connect diverse functions, such as language, memory and motor control. In other words, writing is a great way for a kid to practice getting his act together. (Levine, M.D. The Myth of Laziness. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2003).*

A few developmental factors involved in the writing process include: sequential memory, spatial organization, and fine motor ability. Illegibility occurs when one or more developmental factors are insufficient.

1. To aid sequential memory, visual repetition of the letter pattern with simple auditory instructions reinforces the pattern. For example, say "down, up and around" for the letter "p." By reinforcing the visual sequence and providing simple sayings, two essential learning channels are incorporated into the learning process.
2. It is important to include spatial organization cues such as orientating the letter along the writing lines and highlighting the starting point for each letter.
3. Fine motor delays can be addressed with daily activities involving the finger muscles. Subsequently, by learning letter patterns using a computer, students are able to learn and store a letter pattern without fine motor issues delaying the process. Furthermore, while learning new letter patterns, a student with fine motor issues is prone to developing a poor pencil grip. After using the computer, students know the letter patterns are better able to focus on learning how to hold the pencil. Minimizing the development of poor handwriting habits is essential to legible writing.

## IV. Complete Handwriting Solution

This step-by-step strategy for teaching handwriting complements the exercises contained in the companion Conquering Cursive™ and Powerful Printing™ paper workbooks. Efficient handwriting follows from **repeated practice**. By using both tools, educators break the tedium frequently associated with handwriting instruction through fresh, engaging and diverse exercises. Handwriting really can be fun!

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